

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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ASPHODEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIXEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

CHAPTER IV. "CURTEIS SHE WAS, DISCRETE, AND DEBONAIRE."

THE world was nine months older since Daphne picnicked in the park at Fontainebleau, and the scenery of her life was changed to a fair English landscape in one of the fairest of English shires. Here in fertile Warwickshire, within three miles of Shakespeare's birth-place, within a drive of Warwick, and Leamington, and Kenilworth, and Stoneleigh Park, to say nothing of ribbon-weaving, watch-making Coventry, Daphne wandered in happy idleness through the low-lying water meadows which bounded the sloping lawns and shady gardens of South Hill.

South Hill was a gentle elevation in the midst of a pastoral valley. A long low white house, which had been added to from time to time, crowned the grassy slope, and from its balconied windows commanded one of the prettiest views in England—a landscape purely pastoral and rustic; low meadows through which the Avon wound his silvery way between sedgy banks, with here a willowy islet, and there a flowery creek. On one side the distant roofs and gables and tall spire of Stratford, seen above intervening wood and water; on the other a gentle undulating landscape, bounded by a range of hills.

It was not an old house. There was nothing historical about it; though South Hill, with between three and four hundred acres, had belonged to Sir Vernon Lawford's family since the reign of Elizabeth. There had been an ancient mansion; but the

ancient mansion, being an unhealthy barrack of small low rooms, and requiring the expenditure of five thousand pounds to make it healthy and habitable, Sir Vernon's father had conceived the idea that he could make a better use of his money if he pulled down the old house and built himself a new one: whereupon the venerable pile was demolished, much to the disgust of archaeologists, and an Italian villa rose from its ashes: a house with wide French windows opening into broad verandahs, delicious places in which to waste a summer morning, or the idle after-dinner-hour, watching the sunset. All the best rooms at South Hill faced the south-west, and the sunsets there seemed to Madoline Lawford more beautiful than anywhere else in the world. It was a house of the simplest form, built for ease and comfort rather than for architectural display. There were long cool corridors, lofty rooms below and above stairs, a roomy hall, a broad shallow staircase, and at one end of the house a spacious conservatory which had been added by Sir Vernon soon after his marriage. This conservatory was the great feature of South Hill. It was a lofty stone building, with a double flight of marble steps descending from the drawing-room to the billiard-room below. Thus drawing-room and billiard-room both commanded a full view of the conservatory through wide glass doors.

There were melancholy associations for Sir Vernon Lawford in this wing which he had added to South Hill. He had built it to give pleasure to his first wife, an heiress, and the most amiable of women: but before the building was finished the first Lady Lawford was in her grave, leaving a baby girl of two months old behind her. The widower had grieved intensely, but he

proved no exception to the general rule that the more intense the sorrow of the bereaved the more speedily does he or she seek consolation in new ties. Sir Vernon married again within two years of his wife's death, and, this time, instead of giving satisfaction to the county by choosing one of the best born and wealthiest ladies within its length and breadth, he picked up his wife somewhere on the Continent: a fact which in the opinion of the county was much in her disfavour: and when he brought her home and introduced her to his friends, was singularly reticent as to her previous history.

The county people shrugged their shoulders, and doubted if this marriage would end well. They had some years later the morbid satisfaction of being able to say that they had prophesied aright. The second Lady Lawford bore her husband two children, a boy and a girl, and within a year of her daughter's birth mysteriously disappeared. She went to the South of France, it was said, for her lungs; though everybody's latest recollection of her was of a young woman in the heyday of health, strength, and beauty; somewhat self-willed, very extravagant, inordinately fond of pleasure, and governing her husband with the insolence of conscious beauty.

From that southern journey she never came back. Nobody ever heard any explicit account of her death; yet after two or three years it became an accepted fact that she was dead. Sir Vernon travelled a good deal, while his maiden sister kept house for him at South Hill, and superintended the rearing of his children. Madoline, daughter and heiress of the first Lady Lawford, was brought up and educated at home. Loftus, the boy, went to a private tutor at Stratford, and thence to Rugby, where he fell ill and died. Daphne's childhood and early girlhood were spent almost entirely at school. Only a week ago she was still at Asnières, grinding away at the everlasting prosy old books, reciting Lafontaine's fables, droning out long sing-song speeches from *Athalie* or *Iphigenie*, teasing poor patient Miss Toby, domineering over Martha Dibb. And now her education was supposed to be finished, and she was free—free to roam like a wild thing about the lovely grounds at South Hill, in the water meadows where the daffodils grew in such rank luxuriance; and where, years ago, when she was a little child, and had crowned herself with a chaplet of those yellow flowers,

scarcely brighter than her hair, a painter-friend of her father's had called her *Asphodel*.

How well she remembered that sunny morning in early April—ages ago. Childhood seems so far off at seventeen. How distinctly she remembered the artist whose refined and gentle manners had won her childish heart. She had been so little praised at South Hill that her pulses thrilled with pleasure when her father's friend smiled at her flower-crowned head and cried: "What a lovely picture. Look, Lawford, would not you like me to paint her, just as she is at this moment, with her hair flying in the wind, and that background of rushes and blue water." But Sir Vernon turned on his heel with a curt half-muttered answer, and the two men walked on and left her, smoking their cigarettes as they went. She remembered how, in a blind childish fury, scarce knowing why she was angry, she tore the daffodil crown from her hair and trampled it under foot.

To the end of his visit the painter called her *Asphodel*, and one morning finding her alone in the garden, he carried her off to the billiard-room and made a sketch of her head with its loose tangled hair: a head which appeared next year on the line at the Royal Academy and was raved about by all artistic London.

And now it was early April again, and she was a girl in the fair dawn of womanhood, free to do what she liked with her life, and there were many things that she was beginning to understand, things not altogether pleasant to her womanly pride. She was beginning to perceive very clearly that her father did not love her, and was never likely to love her, that her presence in his home gave him no pleasure, that he simply endured her as part of the burden of life, while to her sister he gave love without stint or measure. True that he was by nature and habit selfish and self-indulgent, and that the love of such a man is at best hardly worth having. But Daphne would have been glad of her father's love, were the affection of ever so poor a quality. His indifference chilled her soul. She had been accustomed to command affection; to be petted and praised and bowed down to for her pretty looks and pretty ways; to take a leading position with her schoolfellows, partly because she was Sir Vernon Lawford's daughter, and partly for those subtle charms and graces which made her superior to the rank and file of school-girls.

Yet, though Sir Vernon was wanting in

affection for his younger daughter, Daphne was not unloved at South Hill. Her sister Madoline loved her dearly, had so loved her ever since those unforgettably summer days when the grave girl of nine and the toddling two-year-old baby wandered hand-in-hand in the shady old gardens, and seemed to have the whole domain of South Hill to themselves, Sir Vernon and Lady Lawford being somewhere on the Continent, and the maiden aunt being a lady very much in request in the best society in the neighbourhood, and very willing to take the utmost enjoyment out of life, and to delegate her duties to nurses and maids. The love that had grown up in those days between the sisters had been in no wise lessened by severance. They were as devoted to each other now as they had been in the dawn of life: Madoline loving Daphne with a proud protecting love; Daphne looking up to Madoline with intense respect and believing in her as the most perfect of women.

"I'm afraid I shall never be able to leave off talking," said Daphne upon this particular April morning, when she had come in from a long ramble by the Avon with her apron full of daffodils; "I seem to have such a world of things to tell you."

"Don't put any check upon your eloquence, darling. You won't tire me," said Madoline in her low gentle voice.

She had a very soft voice, and a slow, calm way of speaking, which seemed to most people to be the true patrician tone. She spoke like a person who had never been in a hurry and had never been in a passion.

The sisters were in Madoline's morning-room, sometimes called the old drawing-room, as it had been the chief reception-room at South Hill before Sir Vernon built the west wing. It was a large airy room, painted white, with chintz draperies of the lightest and most delicate tints—apple-blossoms on a creamy ground; the furniture all of light woods; the china celadon or turquoise; but the chief beauty of the room its hot-house flowers—tulips, gardenias, arums, hyacinths, pansies, grouped with exquisite taste on tables and in jardinières, on brackets and mantel-piece. The love of flowers was almost a passion with Madoline Lawford, and she was rich enough to indulge this inclination to her heart's content. She had built a long line of hot-houses in one of the lower gardens, and kept a small regiment of gardeners and

boys. She could afford to do this, and yet to be Lady Bountiful in all the district round about South Hill; so nobody ventured to blame her for the money she spent upon horticulture.

She was a very handsome woman—handsome in that perfectly regular style about which there can be no difference of opinion. Some might call her beauty cold, but all must own she was beautiful. Her profile was strongly marked, the forehead high and broad, the nose somewhat aquiline; the mouth proud, calm, resolute, yet infinitely sweet when she smiled; the eyes almost black, with long dark lashes, sculptured eyelids, and arched brows perfect in their pencilling. She wore her hair as she might have worn it had she lived in the days of Pericles and Aspasia—simply drawn back from her forehead, and twisted in a heavy Greek knot at the back of her head; no fringed locks or fluffiness gave their fictitious charm to her face. Her beauty was of that calm statuesque type which has nothing to do with chic, piquancy, dash, audacity, or any of those qualities which go such a long way in the composition of modern comeliness.

All her tastes were artistic; but her love of art showed itself rather in the details of daily life than in any actual achievement with brush or pencil. She worked exquisitely in crewels and silks, drew her own designs from natural flowers, and produced embroideries on linen or satin which were worthy to be hung in a picture-gallery. She had a truly feminine love of needlework, and was never idle—in this the very reverse of Daphne, who loved to loiter at ease, looking lazily at the sky or the landscape, and making up her mind to be tremendously busy by-and-by. Daphne was always beginning work, and never finishing anything; while every task undertaken by Madoline was carried on to completion. The very essence of her own character was completeness—fulfilling every duty to the uttermost, satisfying in fullest measure every demand which home or society could make upon her.

"I'm sure you'll be tired of me, Lina," protested Daphne, kneeling on the fender-stool, while Madoline sat at work in her accustomed place, with a Japanese bamboo table at her side for the accommodation of her crewels. "You can't imagine what a capacity I have for talking."

"Then I must be very dull," murmured Madoline, smiling at her. "You have been home a week."

"Well, certainly, you have had some experience of me; but you might think my loquacity a temporary affliction, and that when I had said my say after nearly two years of separation—oh, Lina, how horrid it was spending all my holidays at Asnières—I should subside into comparative silence. But I shall always have worlds to tell you. It is my nature to say everything that comes into my mind. That's why I got on so well with Dibb."

"Was Dibb a dog, dear?"

"A dog!" cried Daphne, with a sparkling smile. "No, Dibb was my school-fellow—a dear good thing—stupid, clumsy, innately vulgar, but devoted to me. 'A poor thing, but mine own,' as Touchstone says. We were tremendous chums."

"I am sorry you should make a friend of any innately vulgar girl, Daphne dear," said Madoline gravely; "and don't you think it rather vulgar to talk of your friend as Dibb?"

"We all did it," answered Daphne with a shrug; "I was always called Lawford. It saves trouble, and sounds friendly. You talk about Disraeli and Gladstone; why not Dibb and Lawford?"

"I think there's a difference, Daphne. If you were very friendly with this Miss Dibb, why not speak of her by her christian-name?"

"So be it, my dearest. In future she shall be Martha, to please you. She really is a good inoffensive soul. Her father keeps a big shop in Oxford Street; but the family live in a palace on Clapham Common, with gardens, and vineries, and pineries, and goodness knows what. When I call her vulgar it is because she and all her people are so proud of their money, and measure everything by the standard of money. Martha was very inquisitive about my means. She wanted to know whether I was rich or poor, and I really couldn't inform her. Which am I, Lina?"

Daphne looked up at her sister as if it were a question about which she was slightly curious, but not a matter of supreme moment. A faint flush mounted to Madoline's calm brow. The soft dark eyes looked tenderly at Daphne's eager face.

"Dearest, why trouble yourself about the money question? Have you ever felt the inconvenience of poverty?"

"Never. You sent me everything I could possibly wish for; and I always had more pocket-money than any girl in the school, not excepting Martha; though she took care to inform me that her father

could have allowed her ten times as much if he had chosen. No, dear; I don't know what poverty means; but I should like to understand my own position very precisely now that I am a woman, don't you know? I am quite aware that you are an heiress; everybody at South Hill has taken pains to impress that fact upon my mind. Please, dear, what am I?"

"Darling, papa is not a rich man, but he" — Madoline paled a little as she spoke, knowing that South Hill had been settled on her mother, and her mother's children after her, and that, in all probability, Sir Vernon had hardly any other property in the world—"he will provide for you, no doubt. And if he were unable to leave you much by-and-by, I have plenty for both."

"I understand," said Daphne, growing pale in her turn; "I am a pauper."

"Daphne!"

"My mother had not a sixpence, I suppose; and that is why nobody ever speaks of her; and that is why there is not a portrait of her in this house, where she lived, and was admired, and loved. I was wrong to call Dibb vulgar for measuring all things by a money standard. It is other people's measure, as well as hers."

"Daphne, how can you say such things?"

"Didn't I tell you that I say everything that comes into my head. Oh, Madoline, don't for pity's sake think that I envy you your wealth—you who have been so good to me, you who are all I have to love in this world. It is not the money I care for. I think I would just as soon be poor as rich, if I could be free to roam the world, like a man. But to live in a great house, waited on by an army of servants, and to know that I am nobody, of no account, a mere waif, the penniless daughter of a penniless mother—that wounds me to the quick."

"My dearest, my pet; what a false, foolish notion! Do you think anybody in this house values you less because I have a fortune tied to me by all manner of parchment deeds, and you have no particular settlement, and have only expectations from a not over-rich father? Do you think you are not admired for your grace and pretty looks, and that by-and-by there will not come the best substitute that modern life can give for the prince of our dear old fairy tales, a good husband, who will be wealthy enough to give my darling all she can desire in this world?"

"I'm sure I shall hate him, whoever

he may be," said Daphne, with a short, impatient sigh.

Madoline looked at her earnestly, with the tender motherly look which came naturally to the beautiful face when the elder sister looked at the younger. She had put aside her crewel-work at the beginning of this conversation, and had given all her attention to Daphne.

"Why do you say that, dearest?" she asked gravely.

"Oh, I don't know, really. But I'm sure I shall never marry."

"Isn't it rather early to make up your mind on that point?"

"Why should it be. Hasn't one a mind and a heart at seventeen as well as at seven-and-twenty? I should like well enough to have a very rich husband by-and-by, so that, instead of being Daphne, the pauper, I might be Mrs. Somebody, with ever-so-much a year settled upon me for ever and ever. But I don't believe I shall ever see anybody I shall be able to care for."

"I hope, darling, you haven't taken it into your foolish head that you care for someone already. School-girls are so silly."

"And generally fall in love with the dancing-master," said Daphne, with a laugh.

"I think I tried rather hard to do that, but I couldn't succeed. The poor man wore a wig; a dreadfully natural, dreadfully curly wig; like the pictures of Lord Byron. No, Lina; I pledge you my word that no dancing-master's image occupies my breast."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Madoline. "I hope there is no one else."

Daphne blushed rosy red. She took a gardenia from the low glass vase on her sister's work-table, where the white waxen flowers were clustered in the centre of a circle of purple pansies, and began to pick the petals off slowly, one by one.

"He loves me—loves me not," she whispered softly, smiling all the while at her own foolishness, till the smile faded slowly at sight of the barren stem.

"Loves me not," she sighed. "You see, Fate is against me, Lina. I am doomed to die unmarried."

"Daphne, do you mean that there is someone?" faltered Madoline, more in earnest than it might seem needful to be with a creature so utterly childlike.

"There was a man once in a wood," said Daphne, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyelids, yet with an arch smile

curving her lips all the while. "There was a man whom Dibb—I beg your pardon, Martha—and I once met in a wood in our holidays—papa would have me spend my holidays at school, you see—and I have thought since, sometimes—mere idle fancy, no doubt—that he is the only man I should ever care to marry; and that is impossible, for he is engaged to someone. So you see I am fated to die a spinster."

"Daphne, what do you mean? A man whom you met in a wood, and he was engaged—and——! You don't mean that you and your friend Miss Dibb made the acquaintance of a strange man whom you met when you were out walking," exclaimed Madoline, aghast at the idea. "Surely you were too well looked after for that! You never went out walking alone, did you? I thought Frenchwomen were so extremely particular."

"Of course they are," replied Daphne, laughing. "I was only drawing on my imagination, dearest, just to see that solemn face of yours. It was worth the trouble. No, Lina dear, there is no one. My heart is as free as my shuttlecock when I send it flying over the roof scaring the swallows. And now let us talk about your dear self. I want you to tell me all about Mr. Goring; about Gerald. I suppose I may call him by his christian-name, as he is to be my brother-in-law by-and-by."

"Your brother, dear."

"Thank you, Lina. That sounds ever so much nicer. I am so short of relations. Then I shall always call him Gerald. What a pretty name!"

"He was called after his mother, Lady Geraldine."

"I see. She represented the patrician half of his family, and his father the plebeian half, I believe? The father was a Dibb, was he not—a money-grubber?"

"His father was a very worthy man, who rose from the ranks, and made his fortune as a contractor."

"And Lady Geraldine married him for the sake of his worthiness; and you and Gerald are going to spend his money."

"Mr. Goring and his wife were a very united couple, I believe, Daphne. There is no reason why you should laugh at them."

"Except my natural malice, which makes me inclined to ridicule good people. You should have said that, Madoline; for you look as if you meant it. Was the contractor's name always Goring?"

"No; he changed his name soon after his marriage, and took the name of his wife's maternal grandfather, a Warwickshire squire."

"What a clever way of hooking himself on to the landed gentry," said Daphne. "And now, please dearest, tell me all about Gerald. Is he very nice?"

"You may suppose that I think him so," answered Madoline, going on with the fashioning of a water-lily on a ground of soft grey cloth. "I can hardly trust myself to praise him, for fear I should say too much."

"How is it that I have seen no photograph of him? I expected to see half-a-dozen portraits of him in this room alone; but I suppose you have an album crammed with his photos somewhere under lock and key."

"He has not been photographed since he was a school-boy. He detests photography; and though he has often promised me that he would sacrifice himself so far as to be photographed, he has never kept his word."

"That is very bad of him," said Daphne. "I am bursting with curiosity about his looks. But—perhaps," she faltered, with a deprecating air, "the poor thing is rather plain, and that is why he does not care to be photographed."

"No," replied Madoline, with her gentle smile; "I do not think his worst enemy could call him plain—not that I should love him less if he were the plainest of mankind."

"Yes, you would," exclaimed Daphne, with conviction. "It is all very well to talk about loving a man for his mind, or his heart, and all that kind of thing. You wouldn't love a man with a potato-nose or a pimply complexion, if he were morally the most perfect creature in the universe. I am very glad he is handsome."

"That is a matter of opinion—I don't know your idea of a handsome man."

"Let me see," said Daphne, clasping her hands above her head, in a charmingly listless attitude, and giving herself up to thought. "My idea of good looks in a man? The subject requires deliberation. What do you say to a pale complexion, inclining to sallowness; dreamy eyes, under dark straight brows; forehead low, yet broad enough to give room for plenty of brains; mouth grave, and even mournful in expression, except when he smiles—the whole face must light up like a god's

when he smiles; hair darkest brown, short, straight, silky?"

"One would think you had seen Mr. Goring, and were describing him," said Madoline.

"What, Lina, is he like that?"

"It is so difficult to realise a description, but really yours would do for Gerald. Yet, I daresay, the image in your mind is totally different from that in mine."

"No doubt," answered Daphne, and then, with a half-breathed sigh, she quoted her favourite Tennyson. "No two dreams are like."

"You will be able to judge for yourself before long," said Madoline; "Gerald is coming home in the autumn."

"The autumn!" cried Daphne. "That is an age to wait. And then, I suppose, you are to be married immediately?"

"Not till next spring. That is my father's wish. You see, I don't come of age till I'm twenty-five, and there are settlements and technical difficulties. Papa thought it best for us to wait, and I did not wish to oppose him."

"I believe it is all papa's selfishness. He can't bear to lose you."

"Can I be angry with him for that?" asked Madoline, smiling tenderly at the thought of her father's love. "I am proud to think that I am necessary to his happiness."

"But there is your happiness—and Mr. Goring's—to be considered. It has been such a long engagement, and you have been kept so much apart. It must have been a dreary time for you. If ever I am engaged I hope my young man will always be dancing attendance upon me."

"Papa thought it best that we should not be too much together, for fear we should get tired of each other," said Madoline with an incredulous smile; "and as Gerald is very fond of travelling, and wanted change after the shock of his mother's death, papa proposed that he should spend the greater part of his life abroad until my twenty-fifth birthday. The separation would be a test for us both, papa thought."

"A most cruel, unjustifiable test," cried Daphne indignantly. "Your twenty-fifth birthday, forsooth! Why, you will be an old woman before you are married. In all the novels I ever read the heroine married before she was twenty, and even then she seemed sometimes quite an old thing. Eighteen is the proper age for orange-blossoms and a Brussels veil."

"That is all a matter of opinion, pet. I don't think young lady novelists of seventeen and eighteen have always the wisest views of life. You must not say a word against your father, Daphne. He always acts for the best."

"I never heard of a domestic tyrant yet of whom that could not be said," retorted Daphne. "However, darling, if you are satisfied, I am content, and I shall look forward impatiently to the autumn, and to the pleasure of making my new brother's acquaintance. I hope he will like me."

"No fear of that, Daphne."

"I am not at all sure of winning his regard. Look at papa! I would give a great deal to be loved by him, yet he detests me."

"Daphne! How can you say such a thing?"

"It is the truth. Why should I not say it? Do you suppose I don't know the signs of aversion as well as the signs of love? I know that you love me. You have no need to tell me so. I do not even want the evidence of your kind acts. I am assured of your love. I can see it in your face; I can hear it in every tone of your voice. And I know just as well that my father dislikes me. He kept me at a distance as long as ever he could, and now that duty—or his regard for other people's opinion—obliges him to have me at home, he avoids me as if I were a roaring lion, or something equally unpleasant."

"Only be patient, dear. You will win his heart in time," said Madoline soothingly. She had put aside the water-lily, and had drawn her sister's fair head upon her shoulder with caressing fondness. "He cannot fail to love my sweet Daphne when he knows her better," she said.

"I don't know that. I fancy he was prejudiced against me when I was a little thing and could scarcely have offended him; unless it were by cutting my teeth disgustingly, or having nettle-rash, or something of that kind. Lina, do you think he hated my mother?"

Madoline started, and flushed crimson.

"Daphne! what a question. Why, my father's second marriage was a love-match, like his first."

"Yes, I suppose he was in love with her, or he would hardly have married a nobody," said Daphne in a musing tone; "but he might have got to hate her afterwards."

At this moment the door was opened,

and a voice, full, round, manly in tone, said: "Madoline, I want you."

Lina rose hastily, letting her work fall out of her lap, kissed Daphne, and hurried from the room at her father's summons.

A TRAVELLER'S TALES.

A MANTEL-PIECE.

IN the house of Mr. David Ross, at Lahore, I had seen bits of Mooltan pottery so exquisite of colour, so graceful in the form and grouping of their ornament, that I resolved to buy some specimens if the chance came in my way. I am quietly convinced that Providence intends me to go everywhere before I die, and in calmness I awaited the decree to visit Mooltan. It came, and it was obeyed without surprise. Those who would travel into Scinde have half a day to wait at this famous but secluded town. All my servants vanished within half an hour, on pretence of buying warm clothes. I threw myself upon the kindness of a Parsee store-keeper, who showed that extreme courtesy and intelligence in which I have never known his race to fail. And I am perfectly pleased to find an opportunity of expressing this opinion of a people, whose very readiness to oblige often exposes them to annoying misconceptions.

The Parsee knew all about earthenware—my belief is that he knew all about everything, from the authorship of the Book of Job to the proper use of the Trevelyan gambit. They are awfully clever, these Parsees. The store-keeper entrusted to me his only son, a pretty boy clad in silken raiment and a gold-embroidered cap, who spoke English like a volume of Macaulay's essays. This child mounted one of my horses, and conveyed me to the "pot-bank," as we say in Staffordshire. Beneath an avenue of peepuls, we passed along the high city wall. Very grand they are still, these memorials of Sikh rule, great barriers which leave nought visible betwixt the earth and sky excepting domes and minarets which pierce the canopy of blue. Arches and gateways break the line here and there. Through the open portal, as in a frame, one sees the dusky narrow street, cleft by sudden torrents of a light that glows and dazzles. In sunshine and shade the many-coloured throng streams ceaselessly. Under the trees upon our right, graceful girls, most ungracefully trowsered, weave and wind and roll their silk on sticks. I do not at all understand

the operation, but it is pretty to observe. The soft and flimsy skeins, red, yellow, or purple, are stretched in foot-wide ribands, as it were, from peg to peg for a dozen yards. They glint in specks of sunshine, and the girls pass to and fro, parting them with staffs, and shyly glancing at the strangers as they move. My little Parsee could have explained it all, no doubt, but I did not ask. What on earth does it matter? Here is a pretty scene, a glow of light and colour, shapely young creatures moving under green leaves; what need to enquire more closely? Be satisfied! Admire and thank Heaven for a glimpse of beauty.

We reached our destination on an edge of waste land, riven with such pits and deep sunk ways, bristling with such mounds and broken walls, as Miss Meteyard describes in her sketch of an early English pot-bank. I saw rows on rows of lovely vases, tiles, basins, objects of every shape, set out to dry. One marvelled at their delicacy of form. It is in this point that the Indian artist generally fails. His sense of colour lies beyond our rivalry, but in shape he falls below the Chinaman. Anything complicated and incorrect he loves, and he thinks himself to have attained the utmost perfection when he has violated every Grecian rule of taste. It is not so with Muhammad Hussein. His sense of form is as true as his feeling for colour, and that he has gathered unconsciously from the sky, the trees, the weather-stained battlements, the girls at their silk, and all the panorama of bright life about his door. If he consults a glass, as I doubt not he does, the artist may occasionally find a motif in the contemplation of his own perfect face and admirable costume.

I remember writing of the man that same night I met him. His beauty, to a painter's eye, absorbed me even to forgetfulness of the charming things around. I do not write of an imaginary character. Muhammad Hussein is producing pots and pans at this moment, and he is perfectly well-known. A Persian by birth, he has carried into exile processes not forgotten but neglected by the Indian potters, and the success of his productions is raising the whole tone of art at Mooltan. If you, reader, wish to possess a specimen of earthenware that shall light your room with a blaze of tints, rejoice the eye with a form classic but unconventional, and a decoration finished, smooth, and new, he will supply it at a price which you, in your astonish-

ment, will call ridiculous. I am very sure that Mr. Lang, the Deputy Commissioner of Mooltan, will be pleased to be your agent. He cherishes the rising fame of his city, and I myself, who have not the pleasure of knowing him personally, am indebted to his zeal for the safe transport of my purchases. The mantel-piece—that of which I write, for I have another more ambitious, but, perhaps, less striking—may be described in the utmost brevity. Bunches of flowers, white or sky-blue in colour, lie on an indigo field. Between the plaques are inserted writings in the Persian characters. I have not yet chanced to entertain a pundit who can read these inscriptions, but I see that Muhammad Hussein has not faithfully executed my commission. I told him to introduce the grand refrain of the nineteenth chapter of the Koran—is it the nineteenth by-the-bye of which the words run after every verse: “Which of the Lord's mercies will ye ungratefully deny?” Whatever be the text he has substituted, it is certainly nothing like this, though my little guide explained with a scrupulous exactitude of grammar, and the man quite understood. For a long while it puzzled me to suggest a cause for this alteration, but in one of my moods of semi-consciousness the truth was revealed.

Muhammad was justly flattered to receive an order direct from “Belati.” Many fine things had he turned out for sahibs resident in India, but I was the first who, coming from England and returning shortly, had preferred the art of Mooltan to that of our boasted manufacturers. So he talked a good deal of the commission I had given him. In the coffee-shop frequented by his countrymen and by wandering Afghans of the Shiah sect, he exhibited his designs, and sketched examples of florid caligraphy with a stick upon the sandy floor. In a short time, the jealous company of native potters heard an exaggerated story of my doings. Muhammad is no favourite, of course. In the first place, he is a stranger; in the second, he is successful; in the third, he is a heretic. Most of the potters, in this neighbourhood at least, are Moslem, for the mystery was not indigenous of growth. Though lax in their religious zeal, they profess the Sunni, or orthodox confession, and their hatred of a Shiah is as warm as any Turk's, if he be a rival in business. Time went on, and my plaques were exposed, as is the custom, on a wall. The indignation of rivals, gradually swelling, fairly boiled over when

Muhammad set up the tiles inscribed according to my order. Here was a Shiah dog quoting the most favourite of holy texts—quoting it, too, in the hateful Persian character—for the whim of an infidel who could have no other object but to mock at Islam. Such impiety was a challenge to the faithful. Every Friday the orthodox Moollah preached upon one aspect or another of this question. The lightest sin of all was adulterating the pure Arabic of Mahomet by transcription into other tongues; but this alone merited death. At the present time this same controversy agitates Madras. The Moollah did not blame me beyond other Kafirs, but he observed that in the hell to which all Moslem heretics are doomed, a special place would be excavated in the hottest corner for the man who built my mantel-piece.

One day, after such a sermon, the less quiet spirits of the audience, bachelors and ne'er-do-wells, withdrew to coffee-shop and bhang-house for meditation on holy things. Here the minister's address was reviewed with increasing animation. A fakir, who made his protest against Kafir rule by stripping every rag from his foul person at the doorway of the bhang-shop, declared the will of Heaven: Muhammad Hussein's tiles must be destroyed, and he himself, if possible. After a due consumption of hasheesh the party sallied out, with sticks and stones. Reaching the "bank," in two or three quick volleys they smashed every bit of earthenware exposed upon the Persian's wall. He was not at home, but his mother was. I had the privilege of seeing that beldame, and I can quite believe that her onslaught was more terrible than that of most heroes of epic. Knife in one hand, veil clutched in the other, she rushed forth to avenge this injury. The assailants dispersed, with laughter and cries, galloping over the waste land, jumping the ditches and the walls. Amongst them was an Afridi camel-driver in the service of some Pathan merchants visiting the town—a tall dashing youth, smooth and sinewy as a panther. Stimulated by a quantity of bhang much greater than his head could carry, he retired at such a pace as kept him just outside the old dame's reach, and chaffed her. She followed grimly, raising every now and then a breathless scream for help. Absorbed in the composition of humorous remarks, the Afridi did not notice how the neighbours were mustering. When he perceived his danger they had almost surrounded him. The "native"

becomes ferocious in the defence of property, as many trespassing sahibs have discovered. After scurrying here and there, the Afridi escaped, but not without damage. He ran for life down a causeway which had high banks on either side, the avengers following. But a Pathan mountaineer has few to match him in a race, and they tailed behind. Suddenly, the way was blocked by a stone archway, with walls on either side. Upon one hand rose a lofty bank, on the other lay a ditch. The Afridi put his shoulder to the rotten door, pressed it open easily, entered, and closed it with a stone.

He found himself in a garden, of the sort affectioned by rich natives. High walls surrounded it, with a kiosk on every face. A shallow canal, faced with marble, ran through the midst, but it was dry and weather-stained. Flowering shrubs and lofty trees grew in rectangular thickets, intersected by tiled walks. The Oriental's notion of a garden is different to ours. What he seeks, first of all, is shade, then the murmuring of water; a carpet and a pipe-stand are reckoned next, I think, and for their enjoyment a kiosk is needful. Then his soul demands flowers of strong perfume, and the sum of human happiness is gained when the Eastern sister of Amaryllis smiles at him from a neighbouring carpet. The garden thus beloved does not commonly adjoin the house, nor is it used indiscriminately. Awkward meetings might take place, and the privacy of female life could not be maintained. The Afridi was not surprised to find his paradise deserted. He crept cautiously from thicket to thicket, and so reached the marble pleasure-house, which occupies the centre—an open building, approached by steps. Machinery, simple but efficient, pours a flood of water into the fountains, cascades, and marble channels which surround the colonnade, but they all were dry. The Afridi thought he might rest himself, whilst his pursuers dispersed. He stole a few oranges and sucked them. Then, deeply meditating, under the influence of heat and bhang he fell asleep beneath the marble dome. The strange events that then occurred to him he related to the magistrate next day.

For the young zealot had been recognised, and when, at night, he was re-entering the serai, where lodged his master, the police caught him like a partridge in a net. With most of those implicated in the destruction of my tiles, he made his appearance at the

court next day. All produced alibis, a thing of course—no man in India is so poor as to be unfurnished with an alibi at need. And the magistrate convicted them duly, one after another, till he came to our hero. That mountaineer was very much excited. With enthusiasm he confessed his guilt, adding that when God has approved a deed, it is not for man to punish it. Such words are heard with attention in a land where the Deity's name is not lightly uttered, where the fancied commands of Heaven too frequently lead to murder upon earth. The magistrate asked an explanation, and proudly the prisoner replied: When lying in the summer-house, he had a vision. An old man, taller than the trees, appeared before him, saying: "The infidel shall be broken like the potsherds of Muhammad Hussein. For himself, fear not! Death is like the bursting of the bud in the pomegranate, when the sweet flower escapes. The joys of the martyr (ghazi) had no end." Thereupon two virgins stood before the sleeper. Their beauty was incomparable, and one said to the other: "Who is this, and how comes he in the garden?" And the other answered, in a voice like that of water, when it laughs beneath the roses: "He is a true believer. Fortunate will be the houris who receive him at the gate!" Then the first spoke again: "Let us give him a token, that he may remember us!"

"They passed away," cried the prisoner, "but here, here are heavenly gifts I found upon my bosom!" He drew a pair of enamelled bracelets from his waistcloth, and shook them above his head. The police closed round him, and his fellow-prisoners drew back in alarm.

When the excitement in court had quieted, the magistrate asked various questions, which were answered not unwillingly. The prisoner declared he had not possession of the bracelets when entering the garden. No human artisan could make such lovely things. He would rather die than allow an infidel to touch them, but if a holy man were found he might show them to the court. No delay occurred in fulfilling this condition—the profession of holiness is so well stocked in India that experienced practitioners can be obtained at a moment's notice. The bangles were received in a consecrated cloth, and shown to the magistrate. They proved to be costly specimens of Delhi enamel, set with gems. That the prisoner had bought them was an absurd supposi-

tion; that he had stolen or found them did not seem probable. The magistrate scrutinised them without remark; when he had finished, the bar asked permission to see, and the holy man went round with his treasures. At that moment came a rich trader of Mooltan, interested in some business before the court, and sat down at the lawyer's table. He had just heard an outline of the strange story, when the bracelets were paraded before him. The old man started—snatched them from the Moollah—and examined them with wide and greedy eyes.

"You recognise those jewels, sir," observed the magistrate.

"No," the merchant answered steadily, though his whole arm shook as he returned them. "They are handsome, but I do not know the manufacture."

It was no one's business. All knew that Selim Ibn Batula had a garden near the potter's field, and it was understood that he had both wives and daughters. But if he did not claim the bracelets—why, every man knows his own property. The Afridi was condemned to a month's imprisonment and a fine; pending his release, the jewels lay in custody of certain holy men.

This is why Muhammad Hussein did not put the writing I had ordered into my mantel-piece. I have a great curiosity to learn what became of the Afridi, his bracelets, and his houris; but the rest of the story has not been revealed to me.

CONTRASTS.

CONTRASTS! they take it as a graceful theme,
Gay children, playing at the feet of song;
The young hearts only knowing change and wrong,
As the dark shadows on the dancing stream,
Or the vague terrors threatening in a dream,
Where the thick-coming fancies mating throng
Neath morning's steady glow to fade ere long;
So to frank youth life's clouds and sunlight seem.
But we, outwearied by the march of life,
Faint, with the burthen, fearful of the goal,
Baffled and beaten in the endless strife
That tires the heart and crushes down the soul;
Embittered, worn, thwarted, and broken thus,
How does the hard word, "contrasts," sound to us?
Have we not shivered as the garish light
Dazzled across our darling's death-cold brows?
And shrunk to see the crimson summer rose
Glowing and flaunting where the cross stands white,
And all we loved lies buried out of sight?
Have we not felt how hard the task-work grows,
When loud and shrill the victor trumpet blows,
And our lost battle dies away in flight?
Have we not yearned for Fortune's least worst gift,
While her crowned favourites waste their lavish
store?
Have we not learnt down Fate's black stream to
drift,
While they laugh careless on the further shore?
What keener contrast! phrase for pastime given?
Life's bitter riddle to be read in heaven!

MY LITTLE TOUR IN WALES.

PART I.

NOT "our" little tour. We all went—Emma, and Adolphus, and George, and Edith, and "Woffles," as well as myself. Only baby and Charlotte and the twins were left behind. So, as far as that goes, I might use the collective pronoun with a perfectly clear conscience. And as for the paying, that was poor Adolphus's affair altogether, as it always was. I call it my little tour simply because I was responsible for it. If it had not been for me "Mr. Adolphus Styffecote and fam." would have spent the six weeks' holiday, annually granted by a considerate government to its valued servants of the Procrastination Department, on the Rhine or among the glaciers, or would have repaired their exhausted energies by imbibing untold floods of superannuated egg-water at Hamburg, or sparkling ink from the iced brunnen of the Black Forest. Ten years ago, when Mr. and Mrs. Adolphus Styffecote, as yet undignified by the supplementary "fam.," started modestly for their little bridal-tour through Normandy, Adolphus endeavoured to console his companion for the somewhat circumscribed limits of that journey by conducting her step by step through the elaborate calculations by which he had already satisfied himself that, come what might, the tenth annual return of that happy occasion would find them in a position prudently to indulge in a real European tour. Alas! poor Adolphus had reckoned, not without his host, but without his guest. George, and Mary, and "Woffles," and the rest, had all been duly provided under the "come what might." Even the twins, who it must be confessed had been but partially included in the estimate, had been happily counterbalanced by the opportune stroke of luck which gave Adolphus his promotion to the senior class fully twelve months before the ordinary time. Where poor Adolphus's calculations were out was in reckoning that he had married one sister, whereas, in fact, he had married two.

Which really, when you come to think of it, was rather hard upon him. A sister-in-law, especially when young, amiable, and good-looking, is a very charming possession, no doubt, but she is not exactly one of those indispensable articles of furniture without which no family mansion can be considered complete. Especially when the family mansion is circumscribed in size,

and evinces a disposition to furnish itself in the department of animated nature with at least sufficient promptitude. So if Adolphus did not regard with absolute enthusiasm his unexpected acquisition in that line, that is a lack of appreciation for which after all he may perhaps be pardoned.

And I am forced to admit that my otherwise irreproachable brother-in-law is somewhat deficient in that respect. Not that he has ever for a moment failed in the most precise and punctilious performance of his duties as host, elder brother, guardian, chaperon, and so forth. Being mortal, it is of course conceivable that he should fail in any duty that may come upon him, but it could assuredly be only under the condition that the world of which he is so distinguished an ornament should previously have failed in its own duty of turning round. So when at Aunt Jemima's death in the very middle of the honeymoon the eternal fitness of things clearly proclaimed to him the necessity of supplementing his pretty and demure young bride with a saucy young tomboy of a sister, poor Adolphus accepted the situation with precisely the same dignified resignation with which he would have mounted the scaffold or taken his seat upon the bishops' bench of the House of Lords.

And from that day to this he has performed its duties with an exemplariness simply exasperating. I could not have been more carefully looked after, or more properly provided for, or more conscientiously kept in order, if he had been a whole Areopagus of maiden aunts. That is Adolphus's way of entering his protest against destiny. And a very aggravating way it is.

It is only quite recently that I found out a way of retaliating. I came of age the other day, and stepped duly into the possession of the hundred and fifty pounds a year that it appears constitutes my private fortune. Of course the first thing I did was to insist upon contributing something at all events towards the expenses of my keep. I did not take much by my insistence. But I did learn something. Hitherto, when I have owed him any special grudge for snubbing me about what he is pleased to call my tomboy propensities, or talking ridiculous nonsense about fuzzy fringes and high-heeled boots, my only resource has been to pull his whiskers, or brush his hat the wrong way, and call him

"Dolly." Now I endeavour to show my gratitude in a practical manner by refusing my glass of wine after dinner, or staying at home from the theatre, or by making some other little attempt to lighten the burthen upon him. Poor Adolphus! It would be a very grievous offence that could not be sufficiently avenged in that way.

But when it came to doing the magnanimous in the matter of the famous tour, and staying at home with baby and Charlotte and the twins, I got snuffed out with remarkable promptitude. He did not even condescend to argue the point. The only question, he proceeded calmly—after a perfectly parenthetic "Nonsense, my dear!" delivered with just that show of rebuke with which a well-balanced mind receives a wholly irrelevant interruption from an only partially responsible individual—the only question lay between Holland and Wales or Scotland. If we really wished to go abroad the financial situation might no doubt be made to accommodate itself to a month or two among the Mynheers and the windmills. But mountain air was an object, especially for Emma, who is not so strong as she might be. So in due course the question was decided; the trunks packed, the younger olive-branches billeted upon old Nurse Corfield, settled down for the last half-dozen years as housekeeper to her widowed son in a dear little farm in Surrey, the house handed over to an opportune old lady from Devonshire in town for a month's physicking, and we ourselves at the Paddington station in ample time for the 4.45 express to Llangollen.

And here I score one against Adolphus at last. He is to meet us on the platform. At the very last moment an important matter has turned up at the department, involving not merely large public interests, but the private and personal hobby of an actual M.P., a strong supporter of government too, and more ominous than all, one of those dreadful new men who don't understand the game and won't play according to the rules. The credit of the department is at stake, and Adolphus knows but too well that if there be a man capable of maintaining it, it is himself. If that outrageous new member is really to be baffled, and the important question properly postponed, he is the man by whom the task must be undertaken, even at the cost of leaving his women-kind to find their way to Paddington alone. And Adolphus acquits himself triumphantly. I can see that before he is half-way across the booking-office by the way in which he

apologises to the too enthusiastic porter who knocks off his hat with somebody else's portmanteau as they race neck and neck for the platform. It has been a severe encounter. The new man, with his ignorance of etiquette, his disregard of the rules of the game, and above all his absolute contempt for the eternal fitness of things, has been almost too much for even the trained skill of the Procrastination Department. Instead of half-past four, it is within two minutes of half-past six when he finally makes his appearance. But every hair of his whiskers is radiant with the sense of an arduous public duty conscientiously performed. He quite beams upon the station guard as that polite but peremptory official stands with one hand on the open carriage door, and the other holding his whistle within half an inch of his lips as he glances at the great station clock already pointing to the fatal, and observes with a slightly reproachful emphasis upon the adverb, "Step in, sir—if you please." Then suddenly he pauses thunder-stricken, and exclaims with unwonted energy:

"Why, bless my soul! Where is Margaret?"

"Step in, sir—if you please," replies the guard irrelevantly, but significantly; with the adverb in unmistakable italics.

"It's all right, dear," explains Emma from within.

"It's all right, Dolly," echoes a triumphant feminine treble from—alas! poor Dolly!—the third-class compartment next door.

"Step in, sir—if you please," cries the despairing guard once more, with the adverb this time in the very biggest capitals; and before poor Adolphus with the very last scintilla of satisfaction discharged from his crestfallen countenance has sufficiently recovered his scattered senses to even attempt resistance, he has somehow been induced to step in whether he please or no, the door is closed, the shrill shriek of the guard's whistle is answered by one deep growl from the engine, the long line of carriages glide imperceptibly into motion, and we are quickly off upon our little tour.

Poor Emma! I hope she is not being held too severely responsible for my sins. And what I should like to know would be the good of wasting ever so many pounds in dragging a nurserymaid about the country for six weeks, merely that my lord's sister-in-law might indulge in the dignified donothingness of the first-class. So I am going to play nursemaid this time, and

earn my keep; and if Mrs. Sanderson owes me a grudge for cutting off her outing, and Adolphus's very wig turn white with horror at the outrage on his hospitality, George and May are well satisfied with the exchange at all events; and as for Woffles, I should like to see Mrs. Sanderson's face if that enquiringly-minded young person were to commence the journey by making serious preparations to climb up on her venerable shoulders with a view to exhaustive exploration of the mysterious black holes, through which by-and-by the lamps will make their appearance, as she forthwith proceeds to do with Auntie Maggie.

As for comfort—well, our compartment is not quite so palatial in appearance as that next door. But our humble third-class compartment is large, airy, and clean; our cushions are soft, our ceiling is lofty enough to defy the most frantic efforts on the part of the investigative Woffles to sweep out the deserted lamp-holes with the feather trimming of her new hat, even when held up at the full stretch of my arms. And as for doubtful company, we have got the carriage to ourselves, and—

But here I seem for the moment to have reckoned without my host. The whistle has sounded, the train is actually in motion, when a sudden chorus of "Now sir!—Look out, sir!!—Hold hard, sir!!!" breaks out from guards, porters, and general lookers-on, and a cheery voice replies, "All right, young people, go ahead; don't wait for me. Catch you before you get to Reading." And then the door is twisted suddenly open, and a curly head in a wonderful shapeless dab of bright grey flannel, closely followed by a broad pair of shoulders similarly clad, plunges precipitously in amongst us. Woffles avails herself of the opportunity with characteristic promptitude. With a shout of delight she jerks the new hat from her own head on to that of the new comer, and is within an ace of following it herself. Luckily, my wrists are strong. Woffles alights on the seat, heels uppermost, but unfractured. I hear a smothered exclamation, "Brats! by Jingo." There is a fresh little chorus outside of "Hi!—Hold on, sir. Stand back, there!" and so forth, and then our door is slammed to with considerable emphasis. A still more emphatic slam echoes from the door of a compartment or two farther on, and as the train clanks swiftly out of the station, the cheery voice came floating back to the

indignant platform superintendent: "Ta, ta, old gentleman. Don't cry! I say; send my hat after me by wire, will you?"

Emma says I spoil these children. I wonder, if I did, how much of the flannel young gentleman's hat would, by the time we get to Reading, be available for transmission "by wire" or otherwise. George is for screwing up his new fishing-rod, specially purchased for the benefit of the Llangollen trout, and passing on the delinquent thatch, as he terms it, to the window of its owner's compartment half a carriage off. Edith opines that it is a nasty vulgar thing, and had better be dropped out of window altogether. Woffles protests energetically that it is her own especial property, the legitimate spoil of her own bow and spear, and incontinently proceeds to empty into it a choice collection of pebbles, amassed in the course of her geological researches in the Square garden, without which she has stoutly refused to travel even to the sea-shore. If the flannel young gentleman has any sense of chivalry, and ever learns the trouble it costs me to preserve his property, he will never wear it again on any less exalted occasion than a Sunday, or a Bank Holiday at the very least!

On the whole, I am not sorry when we arrive at Reading, and the rescued head-gear is triumphantly handed over to the guard for restoration to its rightful owner. And then comes my turn for discomfiture. The tall figure of the guard has hardly disappeared from the window when a taller takes its place, and I am politely but firmly requested to descend and take my place in the aristocratic compartment next door. I produce my ticket, and point to the fatal "Third-class" very legibly printed thereon. My brother-in-law thanks me politely, puts the ticket in his pocket, and, with a stiff little bow, hands me his. If his servant has been left behind, he informs me, it is his business to take her place. He will take charge of the children.

Will he? Well, yes. I am not sure but that, after all, it may be a useful experience. So I sternly suppress a tendency to untimely mirth, and with a solemnity as profound as his own, thank him gravely for his courteous consideration, and take my place by Emma's side. Is Adolphus just a little astonished at my prompt submission? I almost fancy that he is. Has he the slightest idea of what is before him? I decidedly fancy that he has not. "You are a noble fellow, Adolphus," I say gushingly,

as he turns hastily from the door at the sound of the starting whistle; "and remember, if any real necessity should arise, you can always stop the train by pulling the cord over the right-hand window."

"Oh, Maggie!" cried Emma, as the train once more moves on again. "What ever will he do with them?"

"That is not the question," I reply gravely.

"Maggie! what do you mean? Not the question?"

"Not at all. The question is what they will do with him." And then we abandon ourselves to the situation, and in the intervals of Homeric laughter, listen eagerly for the sounds of revolution in the next compartment.

Eight-and-thirty minutes pass away, and the crisis has not yet come. As we draw up at the Oxford platform Adolphus presents himself at the carriage-door to enquire after us, with a politeness as unruffled as ever. I cannot say quite so much for his neckcloth, which is somewhat incoherent, or of his collar, whereof one end hangs limply down, and the other stands out wildly at right angles; or even his whiskers, in the fierce upward twist of which, so different from their usual decorous curl, I recognise the unmistakable handiwork of Woffles. Happily, however, he appears for once blissfully unconscious of these slight derangements, and once more bells clamour and whistles scream, and imperative voices with sublime superiority to mere ordinary rules of sedentary grammar startle the belated soup-absorber with hoarse cries of "Take your seats—going on!" and we are away for another hour's run, to Leamington.

"Perhaps he'll manage them after all, Maggie," says Emma, with a little note of conjugal triumph in her tone.

"Perhaps," I answer, with sisterly dubiety; and at that moment—

Fl'p, fl'p, fl'p—flutter, flutter, flutter—a dark crimson flag comes streaming past the window, making Emma, whose nerves are delicate, jump half out of her seat with its suggestions of danger-flags, accidents, and sudden destruction in a variety of uncomfortable forms.

"Don't be frightened, dear," I say reassuringly, capturing the flapping silk and handing it to her. "It's only Joseph's handkerchief, not his coat. He's alive—so far."

"That is Edith," says Emma, pointing to

the motto, "Love to Auntie," embroidered in the centre in straggling stitches two inches long.

"Probably. And this"—as admission is demanded by a huge pudgy hand ingeniously constructed by stuffing one of poor Adolphus's gloves with the latest intelligence page of his *St. James's Gazette*—"this is George."

Presently something which sounds very like a tiny shriek of "Mamma!" is brought in through the open window, and Emma, jumping up in a panic, is just in time to see the last of Woffles as that enterprising young person is withdrawn forcibly in at her own window again, frantically brandishing to the last something that looks extremely like papa's gold glasses.

"Don't you really think, dear," asks Emma, as poor Adolphus duly appears at Leamington, the merest dishevelled remnant of a once well-starched government official—"Don't you really think we had better let Maggie go back to those young monkeys again?"

But Adolphus is firm. He has pulled up the window on the other side, so that there is no fear of any further effort at self-immolation on Woffles's part. And as for himself, he is quite prepared to perish at his post. Is there anything wrong about him that these young men are laughing in that vulgar way? His neckcloth—dear! dear! So it is. And his collar? Humph! And his— Tut! tut! He really must speak seriously to those children. But as for— And then a shapeless grey hat appears suddenly over Adolphus's shoulder, and a cheery voice proclaims aloud, with appropriate nasal emphasis:

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! Found among the wheels of the Birmingham express, a young female tourist, of prepossessing appearance, and suicidal tendencies. If anybody—"

But the proclamation proceeds no further, for Adolphus faces suddenly round, and Emma turns white and gives a little cry, and I myself utter a small gasp of astonishment and horror, for there is the flannel young gentleman with his neckerchief untied, and the shapeless hat well on the back of his curly head, and in his arms, grimy, tumbled, but perfectly undisturbed, Woffles!

For the first time in our long acquaintanceship I have the opportunity of seeing my reverend brother-in-law without the glass in his left eye. I have never been able to get a distinct answer from Emma on the subject, but my personal belief is

that he sleeps in it. Now, in the extremity of his surprise and dismay, it has actually fallen, and hangs tinkling against his waistcoat button, where his fingers hover round it helplessly as he gazes with blind eyes at the startling apparition, and murmurs at intervals, "By Jove!"

Emma and I give one simultaneous cry of "Oh, Woffles! you dreadful child!" and start forward with open arms to receive possession of our rescued property. The rescued property herself exhibits neither enthusiasm nor penitence. She simply takes with her left hand an eager grip of the flannel young gentleman's chestnut curls, and with her right holds high above her head an oblong green morocco case with elegant gilt mountings and monogram, and in the tone of one who has done the State some service, and who knows it, triumphantly exclaims:

"I dot him!"

Then, with many apologies for the interference, the flannel young gentleman explains how, on his way to the buffet, he observed the young lady in question in the act of scrambling down off the platform after papa's cigar-case, and in a moment of possibly mistaken enthusiasm had dived after and recaptured her. He hopes he has not been indiscreet. Is not a family man himself. Hasn't the slightest idea of the feelings of a parent, so if he has unintentionally put his foot into it—

"P-r-r-r-t! Take your seats—going on! Now, sir, if you please!"

We are off again, before any of us recovered breath enough to break in upon the stream of "chaff" and thank the flannel young gentleman for his opportune aid. I think the guard must imagine that we are all gone crazy together, for no sooner does the sharp appeal of his whistle arouse us from our momentary stupefaction, than we at once plunge into a general scramble for places, with a recklessness worthy of Woffles herself. Even Adolphus no longer insists upon the further performance of his usurped functions of nursemaid, and resumes his original seat with a submissiveness which almost disarms my triumph. Poor Emma, who has succeeded in regaining possession of her rescued infant, hovers undecidedly between the two compartments, and only suffers herself to be hustled into her proper place at the very last moment, and then only with the perfectly unconcerned young delinquent still clasped closely in her maternal arms. As I in my turn tumble out,

more or less headforemost, to resume my own humble station, the young gentleman in the flannel dittoes is already making off towards his particular compartment. But he is no doubt smitten with sudden doubts as to the possibility of reaching it, for, as I plunge, I hear a sotto voce "Phew!" and as the door slams to behind me, a voice over my shoulders enquires, cheerily:

"Pretty game, Puss in the Corner. Anybody missing?"

And there is the flannel young gentleman already comfortably installed in the corner opposite George before I have well recovered my feet after my scramble.

The ice is pretty well broken, fortunately. Indeed, I should fancy that the more brittle properties of that peculiarly English product were very commonly illustrated in the neighbourhood of our new fellow-traveller. Of course I feel bound, as the official representative of the family, to tender our thanks in form for the eminent service he has rendered us in the rescue of Miss Woffles from an untimely end. He receives them with a sort of cheerful solemnity; is much pleased to find he has not interfered with any little family arrangement for the euthanasia of superfluous branches; observes in passing that Miss Woffles appears to be very well put together, and it would be a pity to break her up before she was done with, and so glides gently off into a hope that Mr. and Mrs. Woffles, who seemed—didn't, I think?—a little scattered about by the occurrence, might soon recover themselves.

He is duly reassured on that point also, and somehow—I really don't know how, for we are only four-and-thirty minutes on the road, and I am not given to sudden confidences with chance acquaintances of the opposite sex—before we reach Birmingham there is not, as my metaphorical fellow-traveller would say, an inch of surface available for skating purposes anywhere in the neighbourhood. Arguing, as my Balliol brother says, from the particular to the general—and I know that is the right way of arguing either for men or women, so it must be right in this case—I should say civil-engineering was about as, well as self-possessed a profession, as a young gentleman need be blessed withal. My particular young civil-engineer has been studying it in Birmingham in a practical hammer-and-tongs way, you know; burning his fingers with hot locomotives, and dropping railway girders on his toes, and going in

for the burning fiery furnace business in a general way for the last two or three years to make an accomplished blacksmith of himself. And now he is out of his time—it doesn't in the least occur to him that he can be out of his place!—and has just been taking his last locomotive up the line, and is going back to Birmingham to start on his holiday. Where did we say we were going? Llangollen, and—— Not settled yet? How very odd! Just like himself. Wonder whether—— By Jove! Here we are. And with a brisk good-night, a polite hope for a pleasant journey, and a tender message to Miss Woffles, the flannel young gentleman has disappeared long before the train has stopped, leaving me to recover my breath as best I may.

Which is really not till we are well past Wolverhampton. It is pitch dark now. Either there is no moon or the very particularly foul and pestilent congregation of vapours which here represents the air is much too dense to let a ray of hers escape through it. And all around the low black roof of solid smoke is aglow with the glare of countless huge chimneys. Every now and then a nearer blaze than usual lights up the wide-eyed faces of the astonished children, or makes them grotesque with flitting shadows from strange piles of heaving cranks and slowly-revolving wheels, that start out suddenly from the gloom and beckon ghostly to us and vanish suddenly into the gloom again. Once we pass a tall dark pile that has no smoke or flame and is not a chimney, but tapers away dimly till it ends in a glittering golden cross, and I almost find myself wondering what a church can be doing—down here! This is burning-fiery-furnace-land in very truth, and it is a positive relief to glide at last out of the murky glare into the cool dark fields, with the dim white mist curling here and there in the pale starlight over some low-lying meadow or meandering stream.

And so we glide along, so smoothly and quietly in our big "bogey" carriage that one hardly realises the fact of being actually in an express train. And one by one Wellington and Shrewsbury and Goben, and half-a-dozen other places whose unfamiliar names mix up oddly in the half sleep in which my new acquaintance in the flannels is pursuing me relentlessly over miles of blackest country with a flaming chimney-pot on his head, are reached and passed, and at last the long

smooth run comes to an end, and we are all stamping, and stretching, and rubbing our eyes on the almost deserted little platform at Ruabon.

THE ROMANCE OF THE CAFÉ D'ITALIA.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. A DESPERATE RUFFIAN.

THE criminal court was stiflingly hot that sultry summer's afternoon. The sun beat down fiercely through the windows upon the heavy horse-hair abominations wherewith tyrant custom still does its best to addle the brains of the British bench and bar, and threw more light upon the piles of musty brief-papers piled on the desks, or lurking within the half-open jaws of the solicitors' brief-bags, than ever they received from the minds or exposition of their learned holders; and bench, bar, solicitors, ushers, police, and public all simmered gently in their own heat while awaiting the return of the jury who had retired to consider their verdict.

My lord, on the red cushions which cover the bench, dozed behind the leader in the Times: it would, perhaps, have been injurious to public morality and the dignity of his office had he used a penny publication to conceal his slumbers; elderly barristers who were "in" the case which stood next on the list were studying their briefs, while young barristers, who were not "in" anything, pushed their wigs far back on their foreheads (wigs fresh and white as the unboiled cauliflower), and drew caricatures on ends of draft-paper; and the public—a greasy, unwashed public it was, the public which is wont to hang about the doors of criminal courts at assize times, most of its members looking as if they had themselves drunk lavishly of the corrective justice administered to the prisoner within—this public munched an infinity of apples, conversed in whispers, and stared at the prisoner at the bar.

He was a desperate ruffian this prisoner at the bar, at least the counsel for the crown had certainly made him out to be so, and the learned one who defended him, by no means demurring to the charge, had cheerfully admitted that his client was a desperate ruffian. In fact, he had taken the bull by the horns, and seeing that there was no sort of use in denying the actual deed of which his client was accused, had done his best to assist the prosecution to show that a murder had been committed of

such cold-blooded and unprovoked atrocity, that it was impossible to regard the deed as the work of a sane man, and so to establish successfully a plea of insanity.

There could be no doubt about the murder or its atrocity. The prisoner at the bar was described as a Frenchman, by name Gustave Mas, speaking very good English, and his age by his own account was forty, but his hair was quite grey, and he might, from his whole appearance, have been a man fully twenty years above that age.

He was, at the time of the murder, and had been for some years previously, a waiter in a small restaurant somewhere in the foreign quarter of London not many hundred yards from Leicester Square.

While the jurymen are yet weighing the question of the prisoner's death or life, let me tell you something of the scene and circumstances of the murder.

The Café d'Italia is, as its name would imply, a haunt of members of the Italian colony in that part of London. It is kept by an Italian; its waiters are, most of them, Italian; its cookery is Italian (with a truly Italian abundance of oil); its specialty is Italian wine; and, lastly, the subtle odour of garlic which pervades its dining-room is as thoroughly Italian as the majority of the frequenters of the house.

Not that the Café d'Italia is without a sprinkling of English. A certain number of City men dine there, who know their London well, and not a few briefless barristers and young solicitors, who have discovered that they can dine as well there for two shillings as they can for ten at the more pretentious West End restaurants.

A swing-door, near which, Dryad-like amid a forest of asparagus, sits a neat dame de comptoir, admits you from the street into a long low room furnished with a dozen small tables. The wall-paper is dingy and the furniture plain, but the Café d'Italia burns in winter a cheery British coal fire at the end of the long room, and has always a cosy homely appearance.

It was on an early summer's evening some weeks before the day of the trial in question, in this very room, that Gustave Mas had, as prosecution and defence agreed and as he himself did not attempt to deny, done the deed for which he was then being tried for his life.

The circumstances were as follows:

At about seven o'clock on the evening of the murder two Englishmen had entered

the café. They were both men of middle age, well dressed, and a stranger would probably have guessed them to be, as they both were, "something in the City." They had sat down opposite to each other at a table, ordered dinner and champagne, and the order had been taken and their dinner served by Gustave Mas. This is some of the evidence as to what occurred.

Madame Pirri, the dame de comptoir, and wife of the proprietor of the café, said:

"I saw the gentlemen come in. They were both strangers, I do not remember having ever seen them there before. There were two waiters: Gustave Mas, and Giuseppe Nava, an Italian. The Englishmen sat down at one of Mas's tables. Mas took their hats and coats, and I did not notice anything unusual in his appearance or any agitation in his behaviour. Both the gentlemen appeared to be perfect strangers to him."

James Johnson said: "I am a member of the Stock Exchange. I had a slight acquaintance with the deceased, Reginald Richards. He was of the same profession as myself. On the day of the murder he asked me to dine with him, saying: 'We will try a new place which I have heard well spoken of,' and he took me to the Café d'Italia. The prisoner waited on us. Apparently he had never seen either of us. We conversed on various subjects. The deceased talked most, and in a rather loud voice. The prisoner waited on us very attentively, and was never far from our table. He must have been able to hear a great deal of what we were saying. In the middle of dinner the prisoner dropped a plate which he was bringing to us, and, as he stooped to pick up the pieces, we both noticed that he trembled very much and that his face was very white, and the deceased said, 'That fellow looks ill.' Presently the prisoner brought us coffee. He placed it before me, and stood behind the chair of the deceased. As I was occupied in pouring out the coffee he suddenly drew from his pocket a table-knife, seized Reginald Richards by the hair, forced his head back, and, in a moment, cut his throat from ear to ear. He made no attempt to escape, and refused to utter a word in explanation of his motives."

Questioned as to the conversation which had passed between himself and the deceased during dinner, the witness had replied:

"I cannot speak positively—we talked on various subjects, but I was suffering

from a severe headache and was glad to let the deceased, who was a very talkative man, do most of the talking. Later in the dinner I know he was speaking of politics, English politics, and just as we came into the restaurant, and while we were beginning dinner, he was telling me of some intrigue with a girl somewhere on the Continent—I think he said in France—but whether it was himself or someone else who was the hero of it I cannot recollect. He showed me a gold ring with some French words on it which he wore, and I gathered that the ring was connected with that affair, but I do not know how."

The proprietor of the café, being called for the defence, had given the prisoner an excellent character extending over a period of several years.

That was the whole case. Gustave Mas would say nothing about himself or his motives, and he did not seem to have a friend in the world to say a word either for or against him, except the energetic young counsel who had done his best to make out that the waiter at the Café d'Italia had been suffering from a violent and uncontrollable access of homicidal mania.

And the jury had retired to consider their verdict. Half an hour elapsed, and still the jurymen had not returned. His lordship still dozed behind the Times; solicitors slumbered in the well; the odour of apples waxed stronger; and the whole court forgot, for a space, that it was awaiting the issue of life or death for the grey-haired, weary-eyed alien in the dock.

He is sitting so quiet, this prisoner at the bar, this admitted murderer, that you could easily photograph his face as he sits.

He is a tall, muscular fellow, though his back is bowed as though he had no strength or spirit to hold himself upright, with a square massive head surrounded by thick grey hair, and a grey beard of some weeks' growth; great black eyes, marvellously mild for a murderer, you would say, with a wistful, weary look in them as of a tired, over-worked animal; and big bony hands clasped upon his knees. He wears still his waiter's dress—a threadbare suit of seedy black, with a shirt that once was white, and round his neck, instead of a tie, a silk shoe-lace tied in a bow with its tag of brass dependent.

He looks so quiet, so unmoved, he must indeed be a desperate ruffian.

A flutter in court, an opening and

shutting of doors, a shuffling of feet as the twelve reappear.

The foreman is very pale. He is a worthy, kind-hearted Briton, with a wife and babes at home, and this task of pronouncing on a man's life mislikes him much.

Do they find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?

They find him guilty.

And is that the verdict of them all?

That is the verdict of them all.

There is nothing about madness, and no recommendation to mercy. Of course not. What extenuating circumstances can there possibly be?

Has the prisoner anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him?

No; the prisoner has nothing to say, except a whisper to himself in French which the court does not hear; but that is no great matter, for it is only two little words, "Dieu merci," and a sigh.

So the judge assumes the black cap, and Gustave Mas is straightway sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he be dead, and may God have mercy upon his soul.

And the court rises, for the day's work is done; and the bench bows to the bar, and the bar bows to the bench, and everyone prepares to go his way—except the condemned. He sits so still, in the same attitude, that the warders must shake him before he will rise to be led away to the condemned cell.

And the public goes home, awed somewhat it may be, but still feeling on the whole that justice has been done. And doubtless the public is right, for has not this foreigner slain an Englishman, and slain him, too, for no apparent reason save that he was sitting before him in the blameless enjoyment of his dinner?

So Gustave Mas was removed to the condemned cell. And there he sat, passive and speechless, during the days that intervened between his trial and execution. He refused the ministrations of the prison chaplain; neither would he avail himself of the spiritual services of a Roman Catholic priest. Not a word on the subject of the murder ever passed his lips, and no friend or relation appeared to take leave of him or soothe his last hours on earth. He was quite alone, this desperate ruffian—quite alone—abandoned by everyone, probably because he was such a ruffian; and everyone, from the governor of Newgate to the warders who watched him, was

unanimously of opinion that he must be a hardened criminal.

But the night before his execution, when the good chaplain came to make a last attempt to rouse him to contrition, he asked for pen and paper, and wrote a letter which he desired might be given to the solicitor who had undertaken (nobody knew why, for no one had paid him) to instruct the energetic young counsel in his defence, but the letter was not to be delivered until after the execution had taken place.

And he lay down to sleep that night quite calmly. And the gaoler who watched him noticed that, as he slept, the hopeless weary look left his face altogether, and often he smiled in his sleep and sometimes murmured broken sentences in French, for he was dreaming, this condemned felon.

And this was his dream.

It was summer far away in fair Touraine, in the vine-land by the Loire; it was summer in Touraine, and it was evening. A broad valley, with gentle uplands on either side clothed with mellowing grapes, and between them meadows rich with hay and clover, and musical with the evening song of birds and the far-off lowing of cattle going down to drink at the river which divided the meadows with a girdle of gold and silver. On one side the upland was crowned by a fair château; on the other frowned the edge of a mighty forest; and nestling warmly in a sheltered hollow beneath rose the roofs of a tiny village. The evening shadows lengthened, the hours chimed mellowly from the grey church-tower, the Angelus had long ago rung out and then died away across the valley; the midges danced in swarms in the warm scented air, and to the west down the valley the sun, sinking over the shoulder of a hill, had blazoned the great shield of heaven with all the tints of his gorgeous heraldry, azure and or, argent and gules. Slowly the great ball of fire sank in the west, and the crimson and golden shafts rose up like the van of a heavenly host—like the spears of the archangel's army ranged against the powers of the dark—and flung the last rays far over the river which lay at rest with its flashing scales of gold and silver, as though the fable of old Hellas were true and this were none other than the dragon guarding the Hesperides of that lovely land.

And brushing knee-deep through the clover by the peaceful riverside—his arm round her waist, his breath stirring the

curls upon her temples—there wandered together a young man and a maid. He was a goodly youth and tall, with black curling hair that flowed thickly round his head, and great black eyes bright with hope and love.

And she was fair to see: delicate of form, with pale, clear, oval face crowned with sunny brown hair, and large grey eyes—not the blue-grey dreamy Teutonic eyes, but the darker grey, laden with light-some fancy, brimming over with suppressed esprit, the laughing eyes of France.

Side by side, heart close to heart, they wandered through that lovely land, and they watched the crimson cloud-islands set in a rose-red sea, and their shores were sands of silver, and their mountains were peaked with gold, and they stretched one behind another far far away into the distance where the rosy sea turned to pale shades of amber and opal and delicate green; and here and there between them a little feathery white cloud would sail like a fairy ship laden with messages of love to the happy dwellers on those fortunate isles. And they seemed to wander on and on until they reached the fair cloud islands, and there they wandered still along the sands of silver and under the peaks of gold—they wandered and were happy. And they never thought that lovers' voices grow silent and lovers' kisses cold, that sand and shingle are weary walking for all their silver seeming, that mountains are toilsome climbing though their heights be crested with gold; for they were innocent and young, and the years stretched before them as bright as that evening sky, and twin spirits hovered round them like the moths in the evening air, and the twin spirits wooed their fancy, and their names were Youth and Love.

And he slept quietly, quite quietly, until they came to rouse him in the morning; and he rose calmly and prepared himself, and so died, calmly and quietly, like the hardened criminal he doubtless was.

SET IN A SILVER SEA.

BY B. L. FARJEON.

CHAPTER XXIII. (CONTINUED).

NEITHER Harold nor Mauvain attempts to break the silence which ensues, and presently, Margaret resumes her story:

"We danced and sang for the pleasure of these gentlemen until, wearied and exhausted, my sister sank into my arms. I

watched over her, kneeling by her side, and slept with her, unfaithful guardian that I was. When I awoke in the morning I was alone; my sister was gone, lost to me for ever from that fatal night. In reply to my anxious enquiries—my sister and I had never before been separated for an hour—my master told me a plausible tale of having sent her on in advance of us in the care of a friend; he swore to me that he spoke the truth, and bade me hasten to get ready to follow her. I asked him whether the gentlemen before whom we had performed were in the hotel—for I had some vague idea of appealing to them for protection; and he informed me that they had taken their departure early in the morning. More than one suspicious circumstance indicated that he was deceiving me, but I hoped against hope, and we travelled forward in the direction taken, as he averred, by my sister. In the night we arrived at an inn where I expected to find her; she was not there, and the following morning we resumed our journey; and when, on the evening of that second day, we reached a village, and I learned that all traces of my dear one were lost, the bitter truth forced itself upon me that we had been basely betrayed. It will not help me now to recall the agony of my position. I was in a part of the country of which I was completely ignorant; I was without money, and was utterly, utterly helpless. To have left my master would have been voluntarily to deprive myself of even the remotest chance of recovering my sister. My master was cunning; seeing that I suspected him he offered me my liberty, although, as I was legally bound to him, he could have compelled me to work for him until I was twenty-one years of age. With as much calmness and wisdom as I could bring to my aid I debated how I should act, and I could come to no other conclusion than that my only hope lay in remaining with my master, and keeping a watch over his movements. Months passed, and my hope died away. How wretched was my life, and with what self-torturings was I afflicted! So time passed until I made the acquaintance of Matthew Sylvester and his son. By what means the good man who afterwards became my father obtained my release from the power of a human monster he has never divulged, but it could have been only by purchase, for my master would have sold his soul for money. I travelled with them, sharing their life, and after a time Matthew broke

the news to me of my darling sister's death; he had learned it from my master, and had mercifully withheld it from me. So, with that earthly tie severed, as I believed, for ever, I married Matthew Sylvester's son, and we came to the Silver Isle."

"And here ends your story," says Harold, who has followed Margaret's narrative with the closest attention.

"No; there is more to tell, which will enable you to understand the reason of my visit, if indeed you are still in ignorance of it. When my second child, Gabrielle, was born, a statue of Evangeline, a name loved and honoured in the isle, was set up in the market-place. It was the work of a young sculptor in the old world, and there was great talk of its beauty. I gazed upon it in wonder and terror, for the face I saw was the face of my sister. The sculptor who modelled those marble features must have known Clarice."

This is the first time Margaret has mentioned the name of her sister, and Harold says:

"Do you hear, Mauvain? Clarice?"

"I hear, Harold," replies Mauvain calmly; "the woman had best finish her story."

"I allowed myself to be argued out of my fancy, but it was never entirely dispelled, and events have lately occurred which have fixed it in my mind as a certain conviction. Not only was I betrayed by being torn from her I loved so dearly, but I was deceived in the story of her death. At the time my master informed Matthew Sylvester that my sister was dead, she lived. Why was the wicked lie spoken? To what base end—for what base purpose?"

"Why do you question me?" asks Harold.

"Because you perhaps are the only person within this isle who can relieve my tortured heart. You are the sculptor of the image of Clarice."

"A surmise," says Harold.

"A certainty," retorts Margaret. "There is no name, it is true, to the image, but the letter H is cut in the marble. Your name is Harold."

"Consistently argued. What then?"

"What then?" echoes Margaret, advancing towards him with clasped hands and heaving bosom. "Is it not natural that I should come to you to ascertain the fate of my beloved sister? If you are the sculptor—and you have not

denied it, being a gentleman, who, to screen himself, would scorn to hide behind a lie—you knew Clarice after I believed her to be dead? You are one of the two before whom we were dragged in the night at the will of our cruel master. When me first met here upon this isle you recognised me, and you saw that I recognised you. Answer me, if you have the feelings of a man? What has become of my sister Clarice?"

"Direct me, Mauvain," says Harold. "How am I to reply?"

Mauvain, in a careless tone, gives direction. "In any way you please, in what concerns yourself. If this matter is yours, satisfy the woman according to your whim. Invent, imagine, speak the truth or lie—in short, say anything that occurs to your ingenious mind; but in so far as I am concerned, I forbid you to violate the confidence of friendship. My own affairs I can settle without interference; and believe me, Harold, I will allow none."

Rising to leave the room, Mauvain is suddenly confronted by Margaret, who, now that he is standing with the light upon his face, recognises him.

"Great Heaven!" she exclaims; "you are the gentleman who was playing cards with my master on that fatal night!" She looks from one to the other in dumb amazement; neither Harold nor Mauvain assists her by sign or word. "Will you not speak?" she cries. "Can you stand calmly by, having the power to say what I would give my best blood to hear, and speak no word? Are you men or monsters?"

Mauvain frowns. "You are bold, mistress."

"You would find me bolder," exclaims Margaret, with flaming eyes, "if I had reason to suppose that you, or you"—turning defiantly to Harold—"had wronged my sister, an innocent child, with no knowledge or suspicion of the world's cruelty and deceit!"

Mauvain taps his snuffbox lightly, and with a smile asks: "What would you do?"

"What would I do? I would kill you where you stand! Ah, me! What am I saying? I forget that I am a woman."

"Your forgetfulness extends farther than that, mistress. But in this matter, truly, you would need a champion."

"I should find one," she cries, as hot as he is cool; "there is not a man on the Silver Isle who would not champion my

cause, for it is the cause of right and virtue. And remember, I have men nearer to me who would hold their lives lightly, if I called upon them to avenge a cruel wrong inflicted upon a pure and helpless girl. For she was betrayed—I know it now—I feel it here!" pressing her hand to her heart. "Oh, God! throw light upon this mystery, and bring the guilty to justice!"

"Listen to me," says Mauvain, in his smooth polished voice, which nothing seems able to disturb, "and know your station. Had you appealed to me in a manner which showed that you were aware of the difference in our positions, I might have satisfied you——"

"Having the power?" demands Margaret, every pulse in her body throbbing with passion.

"Having the power," replies Mauvain. "I might, I say, have satisfied you, and told you something of your sister. That it might not have pleased you springs from the fact that you and she are of a different order from those you are now addressing."

"I thank Heaven for it, with all my soul!" cries Margaret, with a growing horror of this polished gentleman.

"Had you chosen," continues Mauvain, "to speak in tones of humbleness, you might have gone from this house—and I bid you begone quickly, for it is mine—some-what wiser than you entered it. During our pleasant interview, mistress, you have asked many questions. Favour me by answering one—the only one—I shall put to you. Lives there upon this isle any person to whom you are indebted for the new light which has so suddenly dawned upon you?"

"Yes," she replies; "Ranf the hunch-back."

"I suspected as much. Ask him to be your champion."

"I will do so."

"Good. Now, go," pointing to the door, "unless you wish to be turned from my gates."

"I will go," says Margaret, walking to the door; "but a voice within me tells me we shall meet again."

"I shall look forward to the interview," says Mauvain, with a graceful bow, "with infinite pleasure."

Never, in her after life, is Margaret able to remember how she reached the gates, and passed beyond them. But she has done so, with no consciousness of time or space, and she sees nothing, hears nothing,

until Harold, who has followed her, lays his hand upon her arm.

"Pardon me," he says, "for my share of the proceedings which have so much distressed you; but I was free neither to act nor speak as my heart dictated. I have something to say to you which could not be spoken within the house you have just left."

His manner is so earnest, and his demeanour so different from that in which he has hitherto presented himself to her, that she cannot but listen to him. He continues:

"In the story you told us of the career of your sister and yourself you said that your lives were pure and stainless. To cast a doubt upon that statement would be, I am certain—on my truth and honour, not as a gentleman, but as a man, I aver it—as false as it would be shameful. I believe it implicitly, unhesitatingly, but for a reason of my own, in which you and your pitiful story play their part, I want to hear it once more from your own lips."

"Shall I utter it again to one who has proved himself my enemy?" she asks.

"I am not your enemy," he declares, with moist eyes and quivering lips; "I swear that I am and would be your friend!"

"It is monstrous," she cries, "that one who assisted to betray my unhappy sister should thus address me!"

"Ah, how you wrong me! and with what apparent cause!—for truth and justice and evidence are on your side, and I stand alone without a witness. You must trust me—you must! Careless, reckless, regardless as I may seem of all that is best and highest and noblest in this life and the next—for I believe in it, Margaret Sylvester—there is in me a worthier spirit than I have ever shown to the world, than I have ever admitted even to myself in my hours of self-communion. In saying this I do not desire to avoid responsibility. As I have sown, so shall I reap—and I have sown deliberately, tares, weeds, and plants which have been as a poison to my soul. Let it pass; what is done, is done, and my life shall answer for it—my life which I account of less value than the frailest blade of grass. But in this matter which you have revealed to-day there is something which is infinitely dearer to me than life, if life were as precious to me as it is to most. I knew your sister; I honoured, pitied, and respected her. May hope and mercy be blotted out for me through all

eternity if by word or deed I ever did her wrong! Do you believe me?"

"I do," says Margaret, carried away by his fervour and earnestness; "you compel me to believe you."

"By-and-by you may believe without compelling, and, of your own honest, unbiassed will, may think of me with tenderness and pity. Voices whisper to me, as they have done to you. Fate and destiny are working to their allotted end, and the hand of man cannot arrest them. Now let me hear once more from your lips that the lives of your sister and your own, at the time I met you in the old land, were pure and stainless."

"Have you a sister?"

"No."

"A mother?"

"No; she died when I was a child. She is to me but a memory."

"A pure memory?"

"She has been to me the emblem of purity—its spirit, its incarnation. In my earlier days I used to look up to heaven, believing that she shone upon me in the light of a star. Not the brightest that I saw—the sweetest and most peaceful, speaking to me, with silent voice, of sacred hopes and aims which have long since died out of my life. You have revived that holy memory. To-night I shall see my mother's star in the heavens; and upon my knees, for the first time for God knows how many years, I shall breathe a prayer."

"Pure as the memory of your sainted mother," says Margaret, solemnly, "was my beloved sister Clarice when you first saw her in the old land." Involuntarily she holds out her hand to him, and he takes it and raises it to his lips. She is about imploringly to ask him now to divulge what he knows concerning Clarice, when, divining her intention, he begs her to say no more at present.

"Soon you shall know all," he says; "I go to take the seal from my lips."

And with these strange words he leaves her, and returns to Mauvain's house.

CHAPTER XXIV. HAROLD DEMANDS AN EXPLANATION OF MAUVAIN.

ON his way, Harold paused two or three times to wipe his lips, which were dry, and his forehead, which was moist, and to contemplate the evidences of Mauvain's exquisite taste and culture. He paused, also, at the group which he had cut in marble of Ranf and Evangeline.

"It is a disgrace to an artist," he mused, "but it is not my property, and must stand as a record of my shame. Thus does an artist sell his soul, piecemeal, for wine and fine linen. But there is a better record in the market-place, which may compensate for this libel. I feel almost weak-minded enough to go and set my name upon it; not this hour, though; I have other work to do."

He walked straight to the room in which he had left Mauvain. His friend was not there; he went then to a smaller room which Mauvain had made into a study. He tried the door; it was locked. He knocked, and Mauvain answered.

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Harold."

"I am resting," said Mauvain, from within; "and cannot be disturbed."

"I must see you at once."

"Must?" echoed Mauvain haughtily.

"It is imperative."

The door was unlocked, and Harold entered. The room was in disorder, and bore no signs of the rest which Mauvain said he was taking; every secret drawer in a large and handsome desk was open, and the table and desk were strewn with papers.

"You have been busy, I see," said Harold.

"I told you," rejoined Mauvain, with a lack of cordiality, "that I was at rest. I did not wish to be disturbed."

"And I told you it was imperative I should see you. I regret the necessity, but it is not the less a necessity."

In this brief dialogue the ordinary tone observed by these friends in their conversations had been lost sight of; this appeared to strike them simultaneously, and they at once relapsed into their usual manner. Mauvain pointed to a chair, covered with papers, and Harold, without apology, scattered the papers to the floor, and took the seat.

"You must have something of the greatest interest to communicate," said Mauvain, with a purposed drawl, "that you intrude upon me against my wish."

"You are partly right, Mauvain; I have something of the greatest interest, not exactly to communicate, but to speak to you upon."

"I observed that you followed that woman out of the house."

"Yes, I followed her."

"And conversed with her?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to relate to me what passed between you?"

"No, I have no such wish; but in what we have now to say, you may perhaps gather something of its import."

"You appear to be in a strange humour, Harold."

"Mauvain, I have seen a ghost."

"Of a woman?"

"Of a star."

"Come, this promises well."

"I almost hope it will not end as well, for if it does my hopes may disappear and my faith may be once more lost, never again to be restored."

"Interesting as ever, Harold; I scarcely regret you disturbed me."

"Mauvain, I must speak to you seriously."

"I hate seriousness, but if you insist upon it, I will not thwart you."

"Let us, then, travel back in memory to the eventful night so vividly recalled awhile since by Margaret Sylvester."

"I have had occasion, Harold, to warn you lately more than once; I trust you are not going to compel me to do so again."

"It is immaterial, Mauvain; no warnings, exhortations, threats, or appeals, can divert me from the goal upon which my mind is set. Spare, then, your breath, and let us converse freely, and, if we can, honestly."

"Have you come to pick a quarrel?"

"Heaven forbid; but if that contingency were to occur, we at least should know how to settle it. We stand on equal ground; we are both gentlemen. Mauvain, I have been your friend; your companion in many a daring and many a foolish adventure, I have never yet had occasion to question your courage or your honour. Not always in accord with you, stung sometimes by the airs of superiority you have assumed—and in which to some extent you were fairly justified—I have followed your lead in idle mood, and have upheld you before your face and behind your back, as was the duty of a friend who, although he could not justly defend, on the strict score of morality, all that was done, still is content to share the pleasure and the consequences of acts in which he is a participant."

"It suited you, Harold."

"I do not deny it; nor do I assume a virtue which I am conscious I have never possessed. But I have always understood—and on my honour I speak the truth—that those who were led by us to share our pleasures, or who of their own

accord joined in them, were like ourselves votaries of pleasure. I use the word in its ordinary acceptation. That some required to be wooed, coaxed, intrigued for—that some held off and by so doing added to the pursuit a keener enjoyment—that some falsely professed, and needed argument, persuasion, protestation, before they joined the hunt—led always to the same result. Judged by a moral standard—I ask a thousand pardons for dragging in such a figure of speech—we and they were invariably on an equality; of the earth earthy—with but one object in view—enjoyment of life.”

“You have missed your vocation, Harold; you should have been a new-school preacher.”

“I have missed much—of which I shall never now obtain possession. What I have said has been not in justification but in explanation of myself. Mauvain, in all that I have joined, in all that I have participated, I have never once had reason to suppose that innocence was betrayed.”

“Poor innocence! and simple, unsophisticated Harold! I see the dimmest glimmer of a light.”

“It will become clearer with every word that follows. I come, then, once more, to the night so vividly recalled by Margaret Sylvester. I need not detail again the events of that night.”

“For love’s sake, no! It is as clear to me as it seems to be to you; although why it should have so much affected you passes my comprehension. But I shall be soon enlightened.”

“I had arrived, without premeditation, in a town in which you were making a brief stay; I could stop but a few hours. There was but one hotel for gentlemen in the town, and there I put up. I was young at the time——”

“Very nearly as young, my dear Harold, as you are at the present time.”

“I would it were so. We had met before, and had formed an agreeable acquaintanceship, almost, if not quite, a friendship. You professed to be delighted to see me. ‘Harold,’ said you, ‘I can give you a night of pleasure and delight. There is here a travelling manager, with two of the loveliest creatures you have ever beheld. I have engaged them to sing and dance in a theatre attached to this hotel, and only my private friends are to be admitted to witness the performance. The manager is a scoundrel, and the girls—well, what such girls usually are. Dine with me, and be my guest for the night.’ I gladly consented—I was proud of your friendship, Mauvain, for your name stood high, as it has always stood, and to be accepted by you was a mark of distinction. Believe me it was not on those worldly grounds that you won me; I had no sordid object in view; but it was because I fancied I discerned in you a nature akin to my own.” Harold’s voice faltered as he recalled these youthful dreams, and his head drooped, and Mauvain, as he regarded the man who was young enough to be his son, was stirred by an unusual tenderness. He placed his hand upon Harold’s hand, and for a moment Harold allowed it to rest there. Then he drew it softly away, and raising his head, gazed at Mauvain sadly, with tears in his eyes. Mauvain, scarcely knowing what he did, held out his arms, as though he would embrace his friend; but Harold held back, and Mauvain’s arms fell to his side. In a constrained voice he said, “Your memory is perfect; proceed.”

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